

Soldier." Mr. Beah said the Child Soldiers Accountability Act "would set a clear example that there is no safe haven anywhere for those who recruit and use children in war." Mr. Beah also posed a challenge to all of us:

When you go home tonight to your children, your cousins, and your grandchildren and watch them carrying out their various childhood activities, I want you to remember that at that same moment, there are countless children elsewhere who are being killed; injured; exposed to extreme violence; and forced to serve in armed groups, including girls who are raped. . . . As you watch your loved ones, those children you adore most, ask yourselves whether you would want these kinds of suffering for them. If you don't, then you must stop this from happening to other children around the world whose lives and humanity are as important and of the same value as all children everywhere.

We have a moral obligation to respond to Mr. Beah's challenge. I hope the Child Soldiers Accountability Act is one small step towards ending the scourge of child soldiers.

Madam President, this narrowly tailored bipartisan legislation would make it a crime and a violation of immigration law to recruit or use child soldiers. Congress must ensure that perpetrators who use children to wage war are held accountable and do not find safe haven in our country.

The Child Soldiers Accountability Act passed the Senate unanimously in December 19, 2007. On September 8, 2008, the House passed the bill unanimously with modest revisions. Now the Senate is poised to pass this.

I would like to again thank all of my colleagues in the Senate who have worked with me to enact the Child Soldiers Accountability Act, especially, Senator TOM COBURN, the bill's lead Republican cosponsor and the Ranking Member of the Human Rights and the Law Subcommittee, which I chair; Senator PATRICK LEAHY, a cosponsor of this bill and Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, who has been a leader on this and so many other human rights issues; Senator RUSSELL FEINGOLD, and Senator SAM BROWNBACK, the bill's other original cosponsors; and Senators CHRISTOPHER DODD, JOHN KERRY, BLANCHE LINCOLN, BARACK OBAMA, and ROBERT MENENDEZ, the bill's other sponsors.

I would also like to thank members of the House of Representatives who worked diligently to revise and pass the Child Soldiers Accountability Act with overwhelming bipartisan support, especially Representatives JOHN CONYERS and LAMAR SMITH, the Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee; Representatives BOBBY SCOTT and LOUIE GOHMERT, the Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security Subcommittee; and Representatives ZOE LOFGREN and STEVE KING the Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and International Law Subcommittee.

Of all the unspoken casualties of war, the use of children as soldiers is among the most heartbreaking and horrific. Up to 250,000 children are currently serving as soldiers around the world. State-run armies, paramilitaries and guerrilla groups use these girls and boys—some as young as 7 or 8 years old—as combatants, porters, sex slaves, spies and human mine detectors. These child soldiers are denied the childhood that our children and grandchildren have and to which every child has an inalienable right.

In Burma, Chad, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda, government forces continue to recruit children, often through intimidation, coercion and violence. Government forces in countries such as Burundi, Colombia and the Democratic Republic of Congo often use children as spies or informants. Government-backed militias in the Darfur region of Sudan, Sri Lanka and Côte d'Ivoire use children in hostilities. Armed groups in Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo and northern Uganda have raped girl soldiers and subjected them to other forms of abuse. A senior officer in the Chadian National Army summed up the cold calculus that drives government forces and armed groups to continue this abhorrent practice:

Child soldiers are ideal because they don't complain, they don't expect to be paid, and if you tell them to kill, they kill.

Despite all of this, there are signs that the world is beginning to rise to the challenge of stopping the use of children in armed conflict. Since 2004, there has been a decrease in the number of conflicts in which children are directly involved, from 27 in 2004 to 17 by the end of 2007. More than 110 countries, including the United States, have adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, an international agreement that sets the minimum age for compulsory recruitment of soldiers at 18. International courts have begun prosecuting those who use child soldiers.

While these are important and positive developments, the reality is that war criminals around the world continue to use children to wage war with virtual impunity. The ability of international courts to prosecute those who recruit child soldiers is severely limited. Too many perpetrators still believe they are outside the reach of the law. National courts can and must play a greater role in prosecuting perpetrators.

As a nation founded upon the principle of individual freedom and a historical leader on human rights, the United States has a special obligation to lead the effort to end the use of child soldiers worldwide.

Unfortunately, recruiting and using child soldiers does not violate U.S. criminal or immigration law. As a result, war criminals who have forced children into combat can find safe

haven in the U.S. and our government has no power to prosecute them. In contrast, other grave human rights violations, including genocide and torture, are punishable under U.S. criminal and immigration law.

I introduced the Child Soldiers Accountability Act to close this loophole. This bill will make it a crime to recruit or use persons under the age of 15 as soldiers. It will also enable the government to deport or deny admission to an individual who recruited or used child soldiers under the age of 15.

Only a handful of countries have passed legislation creating criminal penalties for the use or recruitment of child soldiers to date. By enacting this legislation, the United States will lead the way towards a future where war criminals who recruit or use child soldiers will not find safe haven anywhere in the world. We will send a clear message to those adults who deliberately recruit or use children to wage war that there are real consequences for their actions.

By holding such individuals criminally responsible, our country will help to deter the recruitment and use of child soldiers. This bill will provide an important new tool to the Domestic Security Section in the Justice Department's Criminal Division, which bears primary responsibility for criminal prosecutions of human rights abusers.

We can help to end impunity for the recruitment and use of child soldiers by deporting or denying admission to foreign perpetrators and working with their home governments to ensure they will be prosecuted upon return. There have been only a few international and national prosecutions for child soldier use or recruitment to date. Under the Child Soldiers Accountability Act, an individual who recruited or used child soldiers need not have been convicted of doing so in order to be denied admission or deported. Requiring a conviction would allow those who use children to wage war to benefit from the prevailing impunity for this crime.

Recognizing that perpetrators often use drugs, threats, violence or other means to pressure child soldiers into committing serious human rights violations, including the recruitment of other children, this legislation seeks to hold adults accountable for their actions and is not intended to make inadmissible or deportable child soldiers who participated in the recruitment of other children. This legislation should not be interpreted as placing new restrictions on or altering the legal status of former child soldiers who are seeking admission to or are already present in the United States.

Former child soldiers should be treated as victims and should not be subjected to punitive measures for offenses they committed while they were children. Effectively rehabilitating and reintegrating child soldiers into society requires extensive care and support from family and others. In the absence of such support, former child soldiers